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At the Bottom of Life's Ladder.

BY

L. H. T.

SIXPENCE.

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At the Bottom of Life's Ladder.

BY

L. H. T.

LONDON, 1903.

Published by E. BALDWIN,
"Clapham Observer" Steam Printing Works,
65, High Street, Clapham, S.W.

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CHAPTER I.—Introduction.

In the following pages, an attempt has been made to summarise the principal causes of a man falling to the bottom of life's ladder, the ways and means open to him for regaining his position, his chances of success, and finally to offer suggestions for a better and more humane treatment of these poor shipwrecked souls.

The subject is one, which has never, up to the present, received that attention which it deserves and which it will be forced to receive before long, for instead of the difficulty becoming less complex, its complexity increases as the years roll by, and though I cannot claim to have solved the difficulty in this pamphlet, yet I hope that the perusal of its pages will stimulate the appetite of the reader and lead him to take an interest in a subject, the importance of which, for the future welfare of this country cannot be exaggerated. The material has been accumulated during many years of work amongst the poor in the East End of London, during which time I have had the opportunity of studying all sorts and conditions of men—burglars, thieves, rogues and impostors of all kinds have been interviewed and their tales revealed in a light which on more than one occasion has caused me anxious moments. With these, however, we are but casually concerned in the present work. The particular object being to draw attention to the thousands of honest men with whom I have personally come in contact, to whom *work* would be the greatest blessing; men who shun charity until the internal gnawing becomes so insufferable, that it is impossible for them to refuse it longer.

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To thoroughly understand these men, one must step down from the platform of comfort and join the ranks of the men themselves, for only by actual contact and a total disregard of one's own personal comfort can one get to know the true condition under which thousands of men in London *exist*—one cannot call it living. If the true condition of affairs existing in the East End of London at the present time is due to one thing more than another, it is to the fact that many of those who have the power of applying remedial measures have never studied the subject practically, but have been content to theorize by their own fire-side, and formulate schemes which, when put into practice, have been found to increase, rather than lessen the difficulty. Indeed, how can men, viewing the matter in such a way, expect to understand the needs of men—in many cases as honest as themselves—standing shivering with cold in the midst of a snowstorm, without food, shelter or even a coat to their back? How can they appreciate the feelings of the starving man contemplating suicide or understand the causes of men giving way to crime? Between the feelings of the two there is such an immeasurable gulf that until it is bridged, little, if any good can ever come of any discussion of the subject by them. These remarks apply with equal truth to those who, themselves living in comfort, are content to believe that the thousands of starving men in London are an idle, undeserving lot, and who, by bestowing coppers, shillings and half-crowns upon the rascals who parade our streets in the name of poverty, make themselves morally responsible for the existence of a class, which it should be the endeavour of every true citizen to stamp out of existence; if the money which is given away to these depraved wretches, was given to founding some institution in the East End specially fitted to deal with poverty, a condition of things would be brought about which has never yet been heard of. Ignorance, coupled with this mistaken idea of charity, is largely responsible for the belief held by so many people that you cannot possibly help the class of men to be found at the bottom of life's ladder, and equally responsible for such remarks as fell from the lips of one of our leading Cabinet Ministers last winter, when he was reported to have said "There is no exceptional poverty in London this year";

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yet on that very night over one thousand men applied for relief at one charity alone, and the poverty in the East End was worse than it had ever been for many years if indeed it had ever been as bad before.

There are again, those who maintain that if a man falls to the bottom of the ladder it is due entirely to his own fault, and this being so it is no more than his just punishment that he has to put up with the consequences. To summararily dismiss the subject in this manner must be decidedly comforting to those who, in their ignorance, are able to do it. All cannot so easily set aside the question and it is a great blessing that they cannot for otherwise the sufferings would be intensified and less chance afforded of manifesting the truest spirit of Christianity—human sympathy. Even if many of these human wrecks are what they are it is very questionable if the social condition of the country is not largely responsible for it. If there is such a thing as justice, surely no one can deny that however low down a man may be, he at least deserves that, and yet a man at the bottom of life's ladder is in a far worse position than any homeless dog. The dog gets justice. The man gets none. He is hounded down—trampled on—condemned unheard. Is this Christianity? Is it even humanity?

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CHAPTER II.—Causes of Man's Fall.

If a man is homeless and penniless, shelterless and friendless, or in other words, if a man is at the bottom of life's ladder, his position is due to one of four causes—drink, gambling, old age or misfortune—and under these heads the subject is now discussed.

Drink.—This is undoubtedly the principal agent in reducing a man to a penniless condition; fully sixty per cent. of the homeless out-of-works in London owe their position to this terrible curse, and if one includes habitual drunkards the percentage is considerably higher; these, however, have not been included in the present work, it being felt that they form a particular class, and deserve special attention; with these the craving for drink is more a disease than a fault, and as such, hardly come within the range of the present paper. The particular class of men to whom it is desired to call attention are those who have been guilty of a slight indiscretion, and have on one, or maybe two occasions, taken too much drink, and thereby lost their situation, and being unable to get another have drifted and drifted, finally to land on the rocks of despair, in the dark and crowded East End—familiarly known as the Backyard of London.

These men, it is felt, are deserving of sympathy, and worthy of help; their position is one of great danger, both to themselves and to the country, and even if it has been brought about by their own fault, the punishment they receive is out of all proportion to the offence. If they are dealt with in the right manner these men can be lifted up, and instead of being a burden to the state can be made to play an active part in maintaining the prestige of a great nation. Space alone prevents me from giving examples of hundreds of cases personally known to me, where men have been afforded a stepping-stone out of their difficulties, and have risen higher perhaps than ever, even in their most hopeful moments, they expected.

In placing these cases before many friends interested in the poor, one is frequently told that such cases

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are rather the exception than the rule, and as testifying to this view they will readily bring forward cases in which they themselves have rendered help to men in a similar position, and show how terribly disappointing the result has been. If one enquires into the means adopted for rendering help, one invariably finds that the help given was money, and that in itself explains everything, for to give money to a man when he is out of work and homeless, unless done after most careful enquiry has been made, is absolutely useless; in fact, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it does far more harm than good. There is no greater certainty in the world than that the money so given will be spent in drink. What more natural then than that the uninitiated should at once conclude that the man is a drunkard? One has not to become very well acquainted with these men before discovering the error of so hasty a judgment as this; though it must be admitted that to anyone unacquainted with them, the fact that they spend the money in drink tends to prove that if they are not drunkards, they are at all events undeserving of help: and in this I readily agree if by help is meant money. Money can accomplish much, but the uplifting of these men it cannot, unaccompanied, accomplish. Charity, the grandest and noblest instrument possessed by man, can do much, but it becomes a dangerous instrument when used by unskilled hands, and has frequently been known to drown rather than rescue these storm-tossed mortals; this very fact has probably steeled more hearts against the poor than anything else, and in all probability will continue to do so, for there is no lesson more difficult to learn and none more difficult to teach than that indiscriminate charity relieves no poverty, but only promotes drunkenness and fraud.

In dealing with these men many things must be taken into consideration. Firstly, they are out of work, which is a fact of the greatest importance, for the workless man, whether he be rich or poor, stands ever on the edge of a great precipice; if he is workless, through his own fault, and friendless into the bargain, his position is one of the greatest danger. Secondly, their thoughts of the past; how terrible these must be as they sit and think of friends once near and dear to them, but now

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as far away as if separated by a mighty ocean. Lastly, their shabby appearance. These and many other circumstances must sooner or later tell their sad tale, in bringing them to despise their very selves. No longer are they able to feel that self-respect for themselves, without which no man can feel able to face the battle of life. Of all these circumstances none is more disastrous than this loss of self-respect. All engaged in work amongst the fallen readily recognise this as the greatest obstacle to be overcome in the uplifting of men; when a man loses self-respect he loses everything, and until it can be restored all monetary help, whether in pounds, shillings or pence, is useless, and will tend only to aggravate, not alleviate the man's miserable position. Means must be adopted to assist him to gain this self-respect, and this can never be accomplished by giving him money; the mere giving of money is no doubt a convenient way of ridding oneself of any feeling of responsibility in the matter, but at the same time it is a great mistake. The giving of half-a-crown or half-a-sovereign to such men only means so much more in the till of the public-house, for the public-house is the only haven of refuge open to a man at the bottom of the ladder; there he can get warmth, comfort, and enter into conversation with his fellow-creatures, which is perhaps to him one of the greatest blessings. I hold no brief for the trade, and readily admit that the adoption of such measures only tends to make his position worse, yet I fail to find any evidence justifying the assumption that because he resorts to such places he therefore forfeits all claims to sympathy and help; the very fact that he does do so appears to point to the sadness of his condition, for it seems unnatural after examining so many cases of this kind that anyone should assume that these men fully acquainted with what drink has already done for them, should commit moral suicide by rushing to the public-house. There may be exceptions, but the vast majority of these men do not resort to the public-house because of any desire for strong drink, but simply and solely because it is the only place where the shabby, workless man is not despised. These men can be helped provided that help is given in the proper way. No man likes to feel that he is dependent upon charity, and it is a great mistake

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to allow these men to think that you consider you are bestowing a great favour on them by granting them help; rather should that truer spirit of Christianity manifest itself in making them feel that you are yourself deriving pleasure—as you undoubtedly will do—in helping them. It is imperative that in helping these men one should show them, by actions and by words, that there are still some in the world who do not despise them; they are thirsting for kind words, and yet how few, how very few, ever come their way.

In concluding this paragraph a word must be said with regard to those who may feel inclined to urge that men who so readily resort to the public-house when out of work cannot be possessed of much backbone. Let them imagine themselves out of work, shabby and friendless. The question where to go after spending the day searching for work would quickly arise in their minds, and it is very questionable whether they could find any more satisfactory solution than the public-house offers. The coffee taverns suggest themselves, but these are few and far between, and the comforts offered are small in comparison with those offered in the public-house, though the fare supplied is undoubtedly more wholesome. If men resort to the public-house it is too often because there is no alternative.

Gambling.—This again plays a terrible part in the ruination of men. Its poisonous arrow sinks far deeper than even drink; its effect is more far reaching and its results more terrible than most imagine. Probably in no period of the history of our country has its sway been greater, and certainly never more disastrous than at the present time. The facilities for betting are now so numerous that to bet has become one of the simplest things in existence. The bookmaker may be found in the street or in the public house, and there he may stand like any other free citizen, provided that he does not stand in the same place—a foot or two every few minutes places him under the protection of the law—in fact a dozen bookmakers may use the same spot provided they move round in a circle. These bookmakers are both male and female, and even boys have been known to act as such. The following is an extract from the Daily Press:—

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"BOOKMAKER AT TWELVE.—A boy, aged 12, was fined £2 for using a place for betting purposes. The evidence showed that numerous working men made their bets with the accused. The Magistrate ordered that if the fine was not paid the goods of the father of the youthful bookmaker should be sold to pay the penalty."

Many newspaper boys in London act as bookmakers. Primarily responsible for much of the drink traffic and largely responsible for a great deal of the crime, it deserves most careful treatment at the hands of those in authority, and warrants immediate steps being taken to cope with the fearful moral wreckage which is accumulating as the result of its ever increasing flow. Men, women, and children are daily being caught in its tide and swept away from the paths of rectitude to be swallowed up and drowned in the awful ocean of sin and wickedness. From the errand boy who risks his coppers on a horse he has never seen and whose name he can hardly pronounce to the working man who has his shilling each way, the fearful curse is raging. Many and many are the sad and pitiful tales poured out showing how homes, once comfortable and cosy have been wrecked beyond redemption by mother, father or child being caught in its clutches, and heedless of repeated warnings hurled headlong to destruction. Quite recently a very sad case of this nature came under my notice, and brought ruin and misery to a home which at one time was surrounded by happiness. The wife, during the absence of the husband at work was called upon by the bookmaker and persuaded to bet, at first she won—the temptation to go on was great—money that ought to have been spent in other directions went to the bookmaker, the husband missed various articles, discovered that they had been pawned by his wife and that the money had been used in betting; getting enraged he severely reprimanded his wife, she rushed to the public house. He foolishly gave way to drink also and in less than two weeks the happy home was a complete wreck.

To account for this fever of betting, is indeed difficult. In the errand boy it probably arises from his desire to be "manly" and in a measure, to the hope of winning, but to the average man one would imagine that the hope of winning would appear absurd, for accord-

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ing to the evidence of one of the best qualified witnesses heard before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Betting—there is nothing actually wrong or immoral in a bookmaker pursuing his profession anywhere whatever the evil; though it must be admitted that the bookmaker is bound to win in the long run! The very idea of any man pitting his paltry knowledge, acquired as it usually is from a brief perusal of the daily papers, against that of a man whose whole life has been and is devoted to a study of the business, must on the face of it, appear absurd. And yet, instead of the evil decreasing it increases, because it affords excitement and tends to relieve the monotony of lite. It affords something to look forward to, some excitement to carry men through their daily task and that excitement is what they want, so they give way to the fever of betting and heedless of the consequences, risk and risk their hard-earned money until they finally land at the bottom—ruined. The next step in the completion of the catastrophe is drink. To this they rush, hoping thereby to drown their sorrow, and when ultimately picked up and asked the cause of their fall give the answer drink, not gambling. For this very reason it is difficult to form any idea of the number of men who have fallen directly through gambling, but certain it is that during the past few years, the number has enormously increased.

A large number of those who have worked amongst the poor in the East End of London, are firmly of opinion that whereas ten years ago, drink was the principal cause of most of the poverty, now gambling is responsible for as much, if not more.

Old Age.—Too old. Such is the reply given to the man over 40 years of age who applies for work. What was formerly considered the prime of life, is now in most of the channels of labour, looked upon as something very different. Young men and boys now do the work which formerly much older men were alone capable of doing; they not only can afford to do the work at a lower wage, which to most employers is a great consideration, but it must be admitted, that in many cases, in consequence of a superior education, they are able to do it better. The result is that men

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over 40 are practically excluded from the labour market. The question therefore facing the man who has the misfortune to be thrown out of employment at this age is a very serious one indeed; for a time, he may be able to struggle along, but sooner or later he must come to his last penny and then it is starvation, thieving, or the workhouse. The last is perhaps the hardest of the three. These men simply dread the workhouse. In fact, in many cases they would sooner die than go there and this in some measure is not to be wondered at for though no man cares to go to such places, it must be particularly hard in the case of a man in the prime of life to be told to go there.

There is no sadder sight coming under the notice of philanthropists in London than, that of the honest man anxious to get work, genuinely desirous of maintaining himself, and yet totally deprived of all chance of being able to do so because he is over 40 years of age. The following is a typical case.

> Walter C——, age 41, labourer, born in London, dismissed from his work owing to slackness in trade; spent weeks searching for work; always received the same reply, "too old"; came to his last penny; walked the streets for several nights; fed from the dustbins; at last feeling done up and ill he sought the shelter of the casual ward; was given 10 cwt. of stones to break; was unable to do it and in consequence was taken before a magistrate and sentenced to 14 days hard labour; on arriving at the gaol was examined by the doctor and ordered to the hospital suffering from bronchitis. On coming out of gaol his position was worse than before; at last he was taken in hand by kind friends and a situation, though at a smaller wage than formerly, found for him.

One trembles to think what this man might not have been driven to had not kind hearted friends taken him in hand. Probably, like hundreds of others, he would have joined the ranks of the criminals and become a charge to the nation.

Those unacquainted with men, are ever ready to come forward and blame these men. The careful man, say they, would have something saved. Rarely—very rarely—in the present hard times, is it possible for a man at 40 to have saved enough to keep him the rest of his life. The banking account of the average working

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man can generally be measured in shillings or pence. It is certainly true that fewer men are found at the bottom of life's ladder through this cause than the two mentioned previously, yet their number is very large and some provision ought to be made by Government to enable them to contribute to the welfare of the nation so long as they are able to do so.

Besides these three principal causes of a man's fall there are many others of a less severe type and fewer in number which are nevertheless pitifully sad.

There is for example the case of the man recently dismissed from hospital who finds himself too weak to resume employment at once. He has very little money, if any, and his friends can do very little for him.

The following case, picked from many others, illustrates how difficult it is for such men to gain employment, and yet how easily they can be helped if a little human kindness is shown them.

> Edward V——, age 47, a sign-writer, while following his occupation, fell off a ladder (in consequence of the ladder being moved by someone knocking up against it); one of his arms and several ribs were broken. He was taken to the hospital and detained; on his dismissal from the hospital he was unable to get work and soon became penniless. On enquiry being made, it was found that his few friends could do nothing for him and that though he had an excellent character from his last situation, he was not strong enough to do any hard work. The following testimonial was received respecting him :—
>
> "The bearer of this—Edward V——, has done work for me for several years, in which time I have always found him to be a hard worker, honest and industrious, and very persevering and anybody employing him will have nothing to regret."

He was provided with food and shelter, and in a very few days obtained an order to do some "card lettering." Materials for doing this were provided for him. This afforded him the necessary stepping-stone, and in a very few days he was able to go into private lodgings and maintain himself.

Then there is the parallel case of a man having lost a limb, and thereby incapacitated from following

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his former employment. Sometimes the loss of an eye —at other times an arm or a leg—will reduce a man to the bottom of the ladder. The following case will serve as an illustration :—

> Frederick W——, aged 32, was knocked down while crossing the "level" at East Ham Station; his left arm was completely smashed and had to be amputated. During his detention in the hospital his wife and family suffered greatly, though his fellow-workmen at the works at which he was employed clubbed together and paid the rent of his house. On his discharge from the hospital he was unable to get work, through the loss of his arm. His employers, on being approached, stated that if he could be supplied with an artificial arm and hand, they could find him employment. It was impossible for him to obtain this for himself. Through the kindness of many subscribers to the Surgical Aid Society an artificial arm was obtained for him and he resumed employment. Shortly afterwards extra employment was obtained for him in a band, he being a good musician, and this enabled him to overcome monetary difficulties which had accumulated during his illness.

These are but two examples, but there are many causes at work in wrecking a man's future, and causing him to fall to the bottom of life's ladder, which are little thought of by the well-to-do, and if no mention has been made of them in the present chapter it must not thereby be concluded that they do not exist. The object aimed at has been to stimulate the appetite of the reader and lead him to investigate for himself, rather than to give a lengthy account of particular causes operating in wrecking men and causing them to be stranded and helpless. If this has been done, and the idea so prevalent in the minds of many that these men are unworthy of help eradicated from the reader's mind, then one great aim of the present work has been accomplished.

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CHAPTER III.—The Problem.

The question now is, what is the man at the bottom of the ladder to do? There appear to be five courses open to him.

FIRSTLY, if he has a little money he can resort to the common lodging house, where at any rate he can obtain a bed and a little food at a very moderate charge; his bed will cost him fourpence or sixpence, and for a few extra pence he can obtain fairly substantial food. The accommodation provided is, considering the charge, very good; the kitchens, which serve as the common sitting rooms for all lodgers, are, as a rule, large and well lighted, in addition to which there are large fires burning in the grates—lavatories and wash-houses are usually also provided; the bedrooms, which accommodate from ten to thirty, are large and well ventilated. Indeed, when one takes into consideration the other conveniences, such as pots, pans, kettles, teapots, plates, etc., all of which are provided free of charge, one is rather astonished that so much can be done for so little. Unfortunately, however, though the accommodation is good, such cannot be said of the company. To any self-respecting man the moral atmosphere of a very large number of the "doss house" kitchens must be highly revolting. Men of all descriptions and of all degrees of depravity congregate in them—burglars, thieves, coiners, swindlers, forgers, blackmailers, begging letter writers and impostors of all kinds rub shoulders with the honest working man who, unable to afford a private lodging, is compelled to spend his evenings and nights amongst other than friendly guests. Carefully disguised and more or less acquainted with the customs of such places, one can spend very interesting if somewhat dangerous evenings in such society, though it is extremely difficult to get into conversation with the men, owing no doubt to the fact that every stranger is looked upon with an eye of suspicion. During my first visit to one of these "doss house" kitchens I tried all manner of means for getting into conversation with the men—tobacco was offered, invitations to partake of tea were freely given—but no, all met with blasphemous refusals, and I could see only too plainly that my

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presence was not only unwelcome, but was, to put it mildly, strongly objected to, and that, in short, I was looked upon as a split (detective). Indeed, into whichever kitchen (there were four) I went, my treatment was far from friendly; no sooner had I taken my seat than the kitchen began to empty, and before long I was left to myself; language of the worst description was unmercifully showered at my head, until at last one evening I got into conversation with a chimney sweep, who had previously caught my eye as one of the most jovial and popular visitors in this poor man's hotel. Thanks to this man, and to the kindness of the deputy, coupled with the judicious expenditure of a few coppers, all fears of my being a detective were dispelled, and after a stay of three days I was invited to take part in all sorts of schemes for robbing the rich; in order to give others some idea of the temptations besetting any honest men who may be compelled to seek shelter in a "doss house," I will give two examples. Three men, respectably dressed and evidently well educated, invited me to join in a game of "shove-ha'penny," at which, after a few games, I became fairly expert, and though no money was lost and therefore none gained a friendly feeling was created, and ere long I was invited to join their ranks, and though not agreeing to do so straight away, I nevertheless allowed them to understand that they had nothing to fear from my presence, and in this way soon became acquainted with their methods which were as follows:—Each had a list of names and addresses of gentlemen living in London, and to each of these begging letters were addressed—all were well put together and neatly written—some stated that the writer had fallen on hard times, and after searching for situation after situation had at last obtained one with the tramway company as a driver, but was unable to take it until he had obtained his licence which would cost him five shillings, the letter concluding with an earnest appeal for the loan of that sum; in other cases conductor was substituted for driver. In fact, all manner of reasons were given as excuses for "troubling" the recipient. The envelopes having been carefully addressed, two of the three would set off, and in one day I have seen them bring as much as two pounds back with them. Not only do these men make a living

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from their own letters, but they are willing to write letters of all descriptions for others, for which a charge of from sixpence to five shillings is made; the ingenuity exhibited in the composition of some of these letters and documents is nothing short of marvellous. In the second case, an invitation was given me to join in robbing a public-house, the barman in which had been "squared"; with this I must admit the risk seemed very great, and the arrangements, although no doubt satisfactory to those not actually engaged in the work, were highly dangerous to the principal actor in the scheme. This scheme, I believe, ultimately fell through, for on my refusal to join in it they evidently "smelt a rat," and gave it up as a bad job.

These are only two cases, but hundreds might be mentioned.

The scheming, the ingenuity, and the marvellous cuteness which is displayed by these parasites of society is astounding in the extreme. As one watches and listens to the plans so carefully laid out by these men, one cannot help realising what might be done if only some organised system of education, based on *practical* lines and arranged by men who have studied the problem from the practical standpoint could be arranged. Unfortunately, under existing circumstances, instead of the mental development of these fertile brains being carried on in the lines of advancement, their movement is entirely retrograde, with the inevitable result that instead of being a valuable asset to the country they are an appalling deficit. Many young lives to be found in these "doss house" kitchens, whose mental development had it been carefully guarded might have helped to elevate the nation, are allowed to develop along the wrong lines, and with lying, cheating, and immorality as their golden rule, become instead a great and trying charge to the country and its prosperity.

Though in the common lodging houses honest working men are to be found they are few when compared with the number of dishonest ones.

In the polluted atmosphere of the common lodging house, full of such degraded characters, few men could hope to improve their position, yet such places constitute the only refuge for men who have almost come to the end of their resources.

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Bad enough must it be to be there at all, but cruelly bad when the end of the funds arrives and no sixpence is forthcoming for the night's "doss." A man may have 5¾d., or in the case of the fourpenny "doss" house, 3¾d., yet until he can find the odd farthing required he will not be allowed to stop—at night he will be turned out. Steal, lie, cheat, are the murmurs which meet him on every hand. Driven into such a corner, disowned, friendless, heartbroken, but as yet honest. The temptation is great. Shall he give way? No. It is hard, terribly hard, but honest he remains. His reward? The key of the street. Starving, heartbroken, shivering with cold, he goes forth he knows not where.

SECONDLY, if a man has not the wherewithal to pay for shelter in a lodging house there is for him the casual ward, which is the shelter specially provided by Government for his reception; probably on account of this latter fact most people are ever ready to give this as the solution to the problem, little knowing what the casual ward really means to a man. To give the reader some idea of the treatment meted out to the destitute man who applies for relief, an account is appended which is based on the reports of hundreds of men who have used the casual ward in London.

> You enter at six o'clock—line up in a row—your turn comes to enter—the following questions are addressed to you by the porter or taskmaster:—"What's your name? What's your age? What occupation are you? Where are you from? Where are you going? Have you been here before? What have you got about you; any matches, tobacco or money?"
>
> This over, you proceed to the "reception room," where you receive 8ozs. of bread and a pint of "skilly" (thin gruel), after which you are again ordered to move, this time to the bath-room. You strip and wash, the attendant takes your clothes, throws them into a bag and gives you a white, or it may be a blue, shirt stamped with the name of the particular ward in which you happen to be. You then go to your cell, the door of which is banged to and locked. In the morning, you are awakened by the ringing of a bell and shortly afterwards the door of your cell is opened and your clothes "chucked" into you like peelings are thrown to pigs. You dress and then proceed to the reception room where you get your breakfast, con-

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sisting of 6ozs. of bread and a pint of skilly. All are then called out and each is given an allotted amount of work to do which may consist in breaking 10 cwt. of stones, picking 4lbs. of oakum, or grinding 10 pecks of corn. Each man is taken to a cell in which he finds his task, the door is locked and the work performed in perfect solitude. At 12 o'clock dinner is served which consists of 1½ozs. of cheese, a little bread, and water to drink. Work is resumed after dinner. Tea comes next and this is similar to breakfast. If the work is not finished you have to go on and finish it. In the morning of the second day you are allowed to go out between 6 and 7. You are at liberty again!

If a man fails to get employment on his release and again applies for relief at any casual ward within the metropolitan area he will be detained for four days, for under the Casual Poor Act, 1882—

"A person who has been admitted on more than one "occasion during one month into any casual ward of the "same union shall not be entitled to discharge himself "before 9 o'clock on the morning of the fourth day after his "admission, and may at any time during that interval be "removed by any officer of the Guardians, or by a police-"constable to the workhouse of the union and be required "to remain in such workhouse for the remainder of the "period of his detention, providing that in computing the "number of days during which a casual pauper may be "detained under the section, Sunday shall not have been "included."

Whatever the casual ward may do to help destitute men in the provinces it is certainly worse than useless to the destitute men in London. Instead of helping them it only intensifies the gravity of their position.

The following remarks, recently made by one of the leading magistrates in London in dealing with several paupers charged with refusing to do their tasks, forms a fitting illustration of the impossibility of the task set them:—

"He had had the matter tested and found it was an impossible task. Of course, if men had been doing that kind of work all their lives they might be able to accomplish it, but for an ordinary person it was utterly impossible and a man could not on an average pick more than 1lb. It was true it had been sanctioned by the Local Government Board, and he thought a very grave responsibility rested on them for allotting such a task. He was also curious to

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know whether they had taken advice before making it. Such a rule as laid down by the Local Government Board was most unfair to magistrates, who had been deceived, and it only showed how wrong it was for a magistrate to trust anyone in the world. In one case a person who tested it only picked ¼oz. in the hour, and in another case only ½oz. was picked, and he knew that person worked as hard as he possibly could. Under these circumstances the men would be discharged."

The following extracts from the daily press also throws light on the treatment these men receive and gives the opinion of another magistrate :—

Severe strictures upon the system in vogue at the —— Casual Ward, in reference to the treatment of casuals and upon the conduct of an official, were made by Mr. ——, in deciding a case in which the assistant superintendent was summoned by William ——, an ex-inmate.

Mr. —— defended at the instance of the Guardians. The complainant, an intelligent man, declared that he was violently assaulted and his eyesight injured by the defendant, and he also declared that an attempt was made to lock him in his cell.

The defendant was called on his own behalf. He said the complainant did all that was required of him on the day of his admission. The following day, Sunday, in consequence of his having absconded from the Ward the previous November, and threatened to do so again, and because he was known to be a troublesome and violent man, he was locked in his cell by order of the superintendent. He declared the man's injuries were self-caused. He denied emphatically that he struck the complainant.

The Magistrate: How long did you intend to lock him up?

Witness: All day, except during meals.

The Magistrate: All day! Is there any authority that allows you to do that?

Mr. ——, answering for the witness, cited Article No. 14, but the magistrate said he failed to find one single word in it that justified the inference that an inmate might be locked up all day. A more arbitrary proceeding he had never heard of.

The complainant, addressing the magistrate, said it was quite a usual thing for the officials to use violence towards the inmates, and when the inmates retaliated they were confined or locked up.

The magistrate, in giving his decision, said it appeared to him the complainant had done nothing whatever, in that

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workhouse at any rate, to justify anything in the shape of punishment, and yet he was deprived of his ordinary rights as an Englishman, and put, without trial, complaint or enquiry, into a cell and kept there a prisoner. And all this was done without the least authority or apparent justification. He believed the complainant's injuries were the result of direct violence on the part of the defendant while endeavouring to force him into the cell, and that the complainant had been very badly treated. He therefore fined the defendant 40s. As to the locking up, he could only say that in the absence of any regulations justifying it, it was an abuse of language to pretend that it was done because the complainant was a dangerous man, and had absconded. The treatment he received was a disgrace to the workhouse.

Such cases only too clearly show the treatment to which men are subjected in institutions which, if they fulfilled their proper object, ought to be stepping-stones in helping men to regain their lost positions, instead of which they serve the very opposite purpose. Indeed, instead of the casual ward being the means of saving a man from the disgrace of prison, it serves as the very antithesis, and many a man has tasted prison life first of all through applying for shelter at a casual ward, and being unable to do the task has been sentenced to 14 days or more. Apart from the work given the man to do and the risk there is of being locked up, there is the fact that at the time at which men are discharged from these places there is practically no chance of getting employment of the nature these men require.

When one takes into consideration all the facts, one cannot wonder that these men at the bottom of the ladder prefer to commit an offence and get locked up rather than enter the casual ward. A popular offence is to break a window, and almost any police officer in the East End of London can recall cases within his own experience, of which the following, taken from a daily paper, is a fair example:—

Do you want a job, asked John D—— of Police Constable R——, who was surveying the wreck of a plate-glass window.

No, said the constable, amiably enough.

Well, said D——, you had better take me. I have smashed this glass.

What did you do it for? asked the officer.

I wanted a night's doss, was the reply.

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At the police court he was told that his bed would be looked after by the authorities every night for two months.

I have had many opportunities of conversing with men who have used both the casual ward and prison, and have never yet found one who voted in favour of the casual ward. As an example of the manner in which these men view the matter the following conversation which I had with a man recently dismissed from gaol will serve:—

How many times have you been in gaol? Three times; first for being unable to do the task set in the casual ward, for which I got 14 days; secondly, for house-breaking, for which I got three months, and my last sentence was six months for the same thing.

Why did you enter on a career of crime? I did not enter on it, I was made a criminal because I was out of work and asked for shelter. The casual ward is to blame for it all. I'll never enter a casual ward again as long as I live. Prison is a palace to it.

Are you spoken to unkindly in gaol? No, sir, not a bit of it. You're shown the greatest kindness.

How does the work in prison compare with that in the casual ward? It's ever so much easier: the oakum isn't nearly so hard to pick and *the quantity is 1lb. less.*

How is the accommodation in prison? Very good. The food and everything else is quite satisfactory.

Would a man as a rule prefer prison to the casual ward? Certainly.

Do you think there would be less crime if the casual wards were better? Certainly. The casual wards make criminals. Hundreds of men I know who are criminals owe their position to having entered a casual ward. They get locked up from there, and like myself meet criminals, join the ranks, and continue criminals.

Perhaps the most startling fact in this conversation was the last statement made by this man, when with the greatest emphasis he stated that he would "40 times sooner go to gaol than again enter the casual ward," and, said he, "I could find hundreds of men to tell you the same thing."

This then brings us to the third course open to the destitute man.

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He may commit a crime and get sent to Gaol.—There are those who maintain that there must be something very bad in a man before he resorts to such a measure as this; they overlook the fact that there is probably a certain amount of badness in all of us, only under ordinary circumstances the good exceeds the bad and keeps it under control, whereas in the case of these men, the treatment meted out to them seems admirably arranged for drowning all good and bringing all the bad to the surface. The very fact that the offence they usually commit in order to get lodged in the gaol is simply that of smashing a window, clearly shows that these men are not so very bad; they are not guilty of dishonesty or of fraud; they cause the police no trouble in apprehending them, for they voluntarily give themselves up for the offence as is illustrated by the case already given. Their sole object is to get shelter, and that provided by the police is preferred to that provided by the casual ward authorities. The following description cheerfully given by a prisoner who had tried both casual ward life and prison life gives an accurate idea of the latter.

"After receiving sentence, you are taken along with other prisoners in the van to the gaol; after being admitted and all particulars taken, you undress and have a bath. Your clothes are then taken away from you and you put on your prison clothes; you then go before the doctor who examines you, takes your height and other necessary particulars; you are then shown to your cell; you are not spoken to unkindly but are treated as a human being, which is quite different to the manner in which you are treated in the casual ward. The work given you to do is to pick 3lbs. of oakum. Your bed is very comfortable, you get two sheets, two blankets, and a rug for covering; after the first fortnight you get a mattress to sleep on instead of the plain bed. Everything, so far as comfort goes is as much as any man can expect under the circumstances, and is certainly much better than in the casual ward. When you come out you are given your clothes and anything else belonging to you, in addition to which, if you have behaved yourself, you receive a little money. If you have been in six weeks you get 4d.; if for three months, 2s. 11d.; six months, 9s. 8d.; nine months, 10s. You never, however, get more than 10s. no matter how long you have been in. My reasons for preferring prison life to casual ward life are firstly,

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the work is not nearly so hard. Secondly, the food is very much better and the general accommodation much more comfortable. Thirdly, you are treated with far greater kindness."

To the man who refuses to enter the casual ward, and who will not entertain the idea of going to gaol, there is a course open to him which though it may appear and undoubtedly is very terrible, nevertheless claims hundreds of victims every year—viz., suicide. Of all terrible sights I have witnessed in London, none have affected me more than that of the would-be suicide. Desperation is written on every line of his face and to deal with him an immense amount of tact is required; no good is it to talk to him about hope, he will have none of it; his only hope is in death. With the very skin worn from his feet through incessant tramping after work, with every bone in his body aching beyond endurance and his very life-blood sapped from him by the agony of starvation, can he indeed be held responsible, if in a spirit of desperation he takes his own life? We may look upon him as a coward; we may cite him as an example of what drink brings a man to; but after all, those best acquainted with these men cannot help feeling that to a certain extent we are, if not legally, at all events morally responsible for his death.

Whatever others may think, it is nevertheless a fact that the honest man, driven to the depth of poverty and despair, must either take this course or the next—*starve to death*—which is the last course open to him. This claims many victims every year. To them their home is the street; their bed, the softest stone they can find; their only food, the refuse of a great city; day by day they grow weaker and weaker; at last, too weak to wander further they sit down and die—*starved to death.* Truly terrible; and yet cases of this kind are numerous in London, and when published only meet with the stereotyped exclamation, "O, well it's only the East End." Yet there surely could be no greater blot on the civilization of any country, than that anybody should be compelled to die of starvation. In one of these cases the Coroner in his summing up said :—

"I think it well that the public should be made to understand that these cases do happen, and have hap-

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pened, and when they are published there are people ready to write numbers of letters to the press to the effect that they are untrue. But they are unfortunately too true, and it is only right that efforts should be made to meet them. The Poor Law ought to be strengthened sufficiently to cope with these cases. The whole Poor Law system is on its trial, and there must be some alteration made in order to deal with places having enormous and congested populations like London. As it stands at present it might possibly answer in the country, but certainly it is inadequate in London."

Later, in drawing up the verdict, he said :—

"Do you wish to use the word 'starvation,' or the words, 'want of proper food'?"

The Jury: "Starvation, starvation."

The following verdict was then returned: That the deceased died from pneumonia, caused by exhaustion, exposure and starvation, and that death was due to natural causes.

The Coroner: "It seems difficult to use the word 'natural' in such a conjunction, but I suppose it is correct. Nature did undoubtedly exercise her laws."

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CHAPTER IV.—Conclusion.

Such then are some of the outstanding causes of man's fall and the present existing remedies at hand for uplifting him and again placing him on the platform of independence. It must be admitted that the whole is a totally unsatisfactory state of affairs, and forms but a part of a very grave problem. To deal with the whole has not been my object but rather to deal with men who have fallen and who are genuinely anxious to regain their lost position. Tramps and the whole body of ne'er-do-wells have been excluded.

The solution of the problem can be approached in one of two ways, or in both.

(1) Exclusion of the causes. (2) Alteration of existing remedial measures.

The first suggests itself as the correct solution but by far the most difficult to bring about, yet there is much need not only for more legislation on the subject, but for more rigid enforcement of existing laws, the lax manner in which some of these are administered being largely responsible for much of the evil. For instance, taking the two most important causes of man's fall—Drink and Gambling—consider these.

Quite recently an Act has been passed which seemed at first well calculated to put a stop to man's abuse of drink. Shortly after the passing of the Act drunkenness, at all events in the poorer parts of the metropolis, decreased considerably—so much so, that a constable in one of the worst parts of the East End informed me that during the month he had been on duty he had only had five cases of drunkenness, whereas in the same period before the passing of the Act his average would have been about fifty. Shortly after the passing ot the Act it was by no means an uncommon thing to see the shutters of some of the public-houses in the East End put up at ten o'clock at night lest the license might be endangered by more drink being served to the customers who had probably already had more than enough. Many of the worst streets in the East End were cleansed of the midnight brawls which were formerly of nightly occurrence and

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one could pass along such thoroughfares as the notorious Ratcliff Highway, after the public-houses had closed, with comparative safety; this could certainly not have been said before the passing of the Act. Indeed, to use the words of one of the best known detective officers in London, "I could never have believed that any measure could have brought about such an excellent result."

If the administration of the Act in a strict manner is maintained much good will result from it, but unfortunately there are already signs that it is not being enforced as vigorously as at first and maybe it is doomed to the same fate as the laws relating to overcrowding which, though if properly enforced would do away with the evil altogether, are practically leaving the matter in as bad a condition as ever it was.

As to Gambling.—The laws relating to this require strengthening and those already in force more strictly administered. A fine of five pounds to a bookmaker means nothing. He cheerfully pays it, and probably if increased tenfold he could still as cheerfully afford to pay it. Imprisonment without the option of a fine would do much, but at the same time might constitute an injustice to the bookmakers who are, as a rule, honest men. Yet such a measure might well be adopted in the case of those who knowingly accept a bet from women or from youths under 21 years of age. It is true that these might then get others to make the bets for them, but this could easily be prevented by an extension of the remedy, such as 'knowingly' accepting or 'making' a bet for women or young men under 21 years of age. This I grant would not stop betting, but it would at all events prevent the evil having such a terrible sway amongst women and children. Then again might not education do much to inculcate in the child's mind not only the dangers of betting but the little likelihood of winning? Seeds sown in the early days of childhood would surely bring forth precious fruit. The child does not readily forget lessons carefully given on this or any other subject even when it has reached a matured age. Indeed, there is great need in our educational system of some method of teaching by means of which a healthy moral backbone might be implanted in the child's mind.

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Again, a law against the publication of betting news is also much to be desired. In fact this would probably do more good than anything else, but on suggesting this, one is at once met with the stereotyped phrase—"Interference with the liberty of the press." But what is the liberty of the press, one may surely ask, compared to the ruin of a nation?

To get an idea to what extent the evil is rampant one only requires to stand outside one of the railway stations when the evening papers arrive. How rapidly these are bought up and how eagerly opened to the page on which is revealed the winner's name. Then to the public-house—the successful man to drink to his success, the unsuccessful to drown his sorrow in drink. And so day by day the ruination of man goes cheerfully on—*and this is civilization.*

Alteration of present remedial measures.—The present Casual Ward System which has been in vogue for years now has been proved to be totally inadequate as a remedy for the state of affairs which exist in London and other large cities, and the time has surely come when it ought to be done away with and some better and more humane system adopted. Whether the system I have formulated, and which is given below, is the best is not for me to say, but at least I hope it may lead others better qualified than myself to frame a more satisfactory one:—

FIRSTLY.—If a man is destitute and genuinely desirous to get work, allow him to apply at the nearest police station; let him be required to give full particulars of his case, and this, if he be a deserving man, he will readily do, and on the contrary, if he be an impostor his own sense will hardly allow him to go to the police station. This, I venture to think, would at once separate the deserving from the undeserving. On the police authorities being satisfied that the case is deserving, let them be allowed to give him a ticket entitling him to three night's shelter, with food, at some Government Institution provided for the purpose. Such Institutions might be erected in or near the larger cities, or some present buildings utilised for the purpose.

On admission to such an institution let the man have

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a bath and be provided with anything else, such as needles and cotton, patches of cloth, etc., which would help him in making his appearance more presentable when applying for work; and further, let every encouragement be given him to make a fresh start; in short, let an appeal be made to the *good* in the man and not to the *bad*. As to work, I should feel inclined to say give him very little, if any, to do. Allow him to go out at any time during the day to look for work, but require him to be back at a fixed hour in the evening, under the penalty of forfeiting his ticket.

SECONDLY.—If a man within six months makes a second application, then send him to work for *one* month at some Farm Colony established by the Government; there let him be given work suited to his case and at the same time profitable to the country. In return for this provide him with board and lodgings, and in addition, pay him according to the value of his work. At the end of the month and before his release provide him with clothes and boots in order that he may present a decent appearance. Then give him the money he has earned less the cost of his keep and his clothes.

THIRDLY.—If he applies again within six months, then send him for *three* months and treat him the same as before. If after this he again applies then let him be dealt with either as a rogue or a lunatic.

Such a system, if carried out, would, at all events, give any man genuinely desirous of working a chance of making a start. Though the system might be adopted throughout the country, it would have to be very carefully worked, otherwise a man might, by making short journeys every few days, be able to live at the country's expense for some time without being discovered. Even this, however, would not constitute a greater difficulty than the present "Black List." It is the trouble in the large cities which needs most attention, and such a scheme might well be adopted in London first.

To the Farm Colonies might be attached Labour Bureaux, which, if carefully managed, would be useful to both employers and employees.

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Though I am inclined to think that many men after having had rest and food for three nights would get work, I do not anticipate as much success from this as I do from the Farm Colony; for this reason: A man during three days has not had sufficient time as a rule in which to regain for himself what he has most lost viz., self-respect. Now under the Farm Colony system, the month's stay would help him to regain this. When he leaves there he would be clean and respectably dressed —he would have a few shillings in his pocket which he had *earned*—coupled with which is the fact that he has been "in harness." so to speak, for a month, and in consequence work would not come to him as something strange. Under such circumstances the man would not feel an outcast, but would cheerfully search for employment, and his very appearance and manner would go a long way in securing it for him.

Certain it is that under such a system there would be no likelihood of making him a criminal. If it didn't make him better it certainly could not make him worse, and *any system which even does that, is better than our present system.* Then again, as to the cost; with the exception of the first three days, the cost would be practically nothing, and what, it may well be asked, is the cost of food and shelter for a man for three days, compared with the cost of making and maintaining a criminal?

That there would still remain a great mass of men who would not be touched by such a system no one is more ready than I am to admit, but these I am certain could be easily dealt with if a determined effort was made by Government. For instance, could it not be made a punishable offence for any man to wander the streets or stand at street corners day after day for a fortnight or month without doing anything in any shape or form for the good of the country? Could the police not be instructed to take into custody any man so found? Such men are a growing danger to the country.

If this could be done, and such a system as the one I have outlined adopted, coupled with the strengthening of the Laws relating to Drink and Gambling, we should not hear so much of the terrible distress which of recent years has become a danger to the country.

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